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Few Bright Spots

CIA 'Mighty Wurlitzer' Is Now Silent

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WASHINGTON—The Soviets knew the schedule of the United States' KH-9 spy satellite to the minute, and when it flew over the Uzbekistan missile center everything was tucked out of sight. But a few hours later, another U.S. satellite the KH-11, passed over the same field and caught an aerospace glider out in plain view—giving this country its first evidence that the Soviets were making a craft similar to the U.S. space shuttle.

In the kind of games modern spymasters play, the Soviets had exposed the secret space glider because they had been tricked into believing the second satellite was electronically "dead." Among other ploys, it was made to seem silent. Instead of transmitting its TV-like pictures down to earth as other satellites do, the KH-11 radioed its pictures up into space—to a communications satellite that relayed them to a U.S. intelligence station halfway around the world. (The deception worked until ex-CIA employee William Kampiles sold the operations manual of the multimillion-dollar KH-11 to the Soviets, for a mere \$3,000.)

Supremacy Misleading

Technological cleverness is the pride of U.S. intelligence—no nation is better at it—and that supremacy can be a source of comfort to the American people as U.S. military vulnerability in the early 1980s puts greater reliance on intelligence to avoid dangerous surprises.

But American supremacy in technical intelligence is profoundly misleading. It is not representative of U.S. intelligence capabilities as a whole but stands in stark contrast. For in every other intelligence field—human spies, analysis of data collected and ability to conduct secret operations—the U.S. intelligence community appears to be dangerously deficient.

"Except for technical surveillance of the Soviet Union," said one highly knowledgeable source, "we're in lousy shape throughout the world." Some examples:

—Human intelligence sources have largely dried up because of leaks. "Some potentially cooperative sources say frankly they are afraid they might find their names in our newspapers," one knowledgeable source said, "and I must say for myself that if I were a Libyan or Pakistani, to say nothing of a Soviet, I would not cooperate today with any American intelligence agency."

Firings, Retirements Costly

—Recent waves of firings and early retirements cost the CIA many hundreds of senior personnel with unique language abilities and regional expertise. In 1978, when Iran's Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi fell, the agency did not have a single regular employee who could speak Persian. A large percentage of the field officers of its Near East division, which includes Southwest Asia, are former employees recalled to temporary duty, according to an informed source.

—In Africa and Latin America, the United States must rely heavily on information supplied by British, French and West German agencies. But cooperation has slowed signifi-

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defining Soviet oil production declines," one national security official said, "but they almost missed the Afghanistan invasion, after watching the Soviet buildup for six months, because they focused on reasons Moscow would not move—detente, SALT II, trade.

"They are biased to predict the ordinary, not surprises," he said.

—The CIA's covert action capability, which once undertook everything from propaganda campaigns to secret wars, has been virtually dismantled.

Hostage Raid Cited

The raid to free U.S. hostages in Iran, for example, would have had a better chance if it had been organized and run by the CIA, according to several intelligence officials as well as one military officer who took part in the ad hoc Pentagon effort.

At a less dramatic level, the CIA's ability to aid insurgent groups short of intervention is almost nonexistent. "If we wanted to help the Afghan 'freedom fighters' with guns," one source said, "there is no supply of untraceable arms, no experienced gunrunners, no transportation assets available readily. And the Soviets know it."

Political covert action, such as planting newspaper stories and aiding sympathetic officials abroad, never was suspended totally by the CIA, even in the Carter Administration. "But it's on a piddling scale," one official said, "and what's left is rather atrophied."

Carter became angry at Cuba's continued use of its troops in Africa after his initial overture to Fidel Castro in 1977 for more normal relations. He ordered accounts of Castro's activities to be disseminated internationally. But most of the machinery for such propagandizing—the "Mighty Wurlitzer" once boasted by the CIA—has deteriorated into rusty silence.

Even the U.S. Information Agency resisted Carter's orders to play up anti-Castro stories. This particularly incensed the President and led to a minor shake-up within that agency, informants said.

Such is the debris left from the unprecedented campaigns against the intelligence and counterintelligence agencies in the government particularly the CIA.

Brought on Themselves

To a considerable degree, the agencies brought it on themselves with foreign and domestic crimes and excesses in the name of national security. As a result, powerful figures in the Carter Administration, including Vice President Walter F. Mondale who served on the Senate committee that publicized CIA abuses, seemed intent initially on punishing the intelligence community.